

Compiled Research on 245 Aquetong Road,  
New Hope, Pennsylvania

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Hist195

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The property located at 245 Aquetong Rd (tax parcel 41-36-22) seems to have a straightforward history, but further research shows several interesting inconsistencies, some of which are quite unusual. The property is currently owned by the Frank family, who bought it in the 1940s. What was originally two hundred acres has since been whittled down to almost eleven (10.86). Yet questions remain, as some maps and other evidence do not match the deeds.

### **Chain of Title**

The first mention of the property is in 1737, though the patent was recorded in 1765. John Penn, Esq sold the land to Thomas Ross for £ 220, at the rate of £ 110 per 100 acres. The total grant was 200 acres, with an allowance of 6 acres for roads. The meets and bounds are described as follows:

Beginning at a Heap of Stones Thence by Thomas Rofs's other land West one hundred and nineteen Perches and three quarters to a Stone and South seventy Perches to a Stone Thence by William Blackfan's Land North forty six Degrees West eighty five Perches & two tenths to a post near a small Hickory Thence by Land of George Ely North twelve degrees East two hundred and eighteen Perches to a marked black Oak Thence by land in the Tenure of John Garretson East one Degree North one hundred and thirty one Perches to a Heap of Stones Thence by Land of Thomas Phillips and late of Thomas Humpherys deceased South one Degree & a half East Two hundred and five Perches to the place of Beginning Containing Two hundred Acres and the usual Allowance of Six Acres & Cent for Roads...

(Figure 1) (b AA-No 6 p 139)

The chain of title follows the land straight back to Thomas Ross, but after comparing the boundaries and maps from the 1700s, 1800s and today, the first of the discrepancies appears. Ross's tract, number 35, and those of the neighbors mentioned in the land grant, are on the south side of Solebury Mountain. However, the current property is on the north side of the ridge, on the southeast corner of what would have been Benjamin Canby's tract, number 39. No firm explanation has been found at this time. (Map 1)

Ross sold 150 acres of the property to his son John and his wife Mary in 1768. (b 13 p 22). The printout of this deed held by the writer is largely illegible. A copy of it is included in the appendix, and efforts will be made in the future to find a much more readable one.

The property was then further divided in 1771, when John and Mary Ross sold 30 acres of their land to Timothy Scott. (b 56 p 390) Scott built the stone house that currently stands on the property circa 1772 - 1780. (See Appendix D) The boundaries of Scott's property in the deed are slightly more readable.

Beginning at a heap of stones in the line of the land late in the Tenure of Thomas Phillips, now in the Tenure of Thomas Lewis Thence by the said land and land late in the Tenure of Thomas Humphreys as ceased South one degree and a half east One hundred and one perches to a Rock Thence by land of John Ross west two degrees South forty seven perches and six tenths to stones Thence by land of the said John Ross north one degree and a half west one hundred and one perches to a heap of stones Thence by land late in the Tenure of John Garrison east two degrees north forty seven perches and six tenths to stone the place of Beginning Containing thirty acres...

(Figure 2)

Though it is hard to picture the property lines without an accurate map of the area, the property should fall within the northeast corner of the Ross tract. Yet the house and current land are well to the north. One possible explanation as to when the boundaries became confused (whether on purpose or by accident will probably never be known) is the inclusion of the Lewis boundary. Tract 38 was, according to map 2, the Lewis property, which is right next to the Canby tract. Perhaps Thomas Ross claimed more than his share? Of course, this is merely an inference, as there appear to be no readily available maps from when the land was first subdivided.

In 1775, Timothy Scott and several partners, including a Thomas Ross Jr., invested in a fishery, buying the land from Aaron Phillips. (b 17 p 30) The fishery was of course not on Scott's land, and further research will be needed to pin down exactly where on the riverbank it existed. The deed is vague, and does not give a total acreage, stating only "... for the Use of a Fishery a Certain Bank & Shore now the Property and in the Tenure of the said Aaron Phillips; Beginning at a forked Black Oak (being the lower Corner of the said Aaron Phillip's land) and Extending up the River Delaware One hundred & Nineteen Perches..." Timothy Scott died intestate in 1792, and the inventory of his estate confirms that he did own a share of the fishery. (Will 2364)

The estate record was not confirmed by the Orphans Court until 1800, which is most likely when the property was finally passed to Timothy Scott's son, John Scott. No further mention is made of the fishery. John kept the property until his death in 1823, when it was bequeathed in his will to his daughter, Mary Taylor. She, in turn, sold 10 acres, 113 perches of it to Benjamin Adams in 1840. (b 65 p 284) The property has remained at around the same size ever since.

Beginning at a stone in a line of Jonathan P. Magill's land thence along said line one degree and a half West thirty six perches to a stone in the middle of a [?] road Thence along said road East five degrees south forty seven perches and six tenths to a stone along another [?] road and by land of John Simpson South one degree and a half East thirty six perches to a stone thence by land of Jonathan P. Magill West two degrees South forty seven perches and six tenths to the place of beginning Containing within the bounds described aforesaid ten acres and one hundred and thirteen perches.

(Figure 3)

The deed goes on further to identify the land as being part of John Ross's 30 acres. This is where we return to the problem of the Canby tract. *The Early Settlers of Solebury Township Bucks County, Pa* shows that tract 39 lot 3, was owned by Benjamin Adams in 1859. (Reeder tract 39 p 2) Question marks appear in the 1876 and 1891 columns. The position of the roads on the map on that page clearly show that Adams' property was exactly where the present one is. No mention is made in the Canby section of Adams, except for that chart.

The next mention we find of the land is in 1869, when it is transferred from Benjamin Adams' Estate to Johnson W. Pidcock (b 147 p 561), and then, on the same day, to Mary C. Bowden. (b 147 p 564) It is as the M. Bowden land that the property appears on two maps, one from 1876, and the other from 1891. Interesting to note is the fact that Dark Hollow Run, which today runs roughly along the northern border of the land, appears relatively close to the north in the Reeder map (map 1), is much further away in the 1876 and 1891 maps (maps 2 and 3). Probably, the branch running through the property is an offshoot of the main stream. Mary Bowden and her heirs held onto the property until 1946, when it was seized by the government. No taxes had been paid from 1934 onward, so it was sold to whoever could afford to pay them. Mabel C Frank, great grandmother to this writer, paid only \$303.05. (b 830 p 316)

When Mabel died in 1954, her husband filed a deed, passing it from her estate to his name. (b 1158 p 478) Two years later, he in turn gave it to his son Ralph Frank, and his wife Jean A. Frank. The most recent deed (b 785 p 1191) shows the previous owner, Jean A. Frank. In 1993 she transferred the property out of her husband's estate to her own name for tax purposes. Currently it is owned by the children of the Franks, this writer's aunts and uncles. Anna M. Fish, my mother, and John T. Fish, my father, have been on the deed since my grandmother passed. My parents and I live on the newer house on the property. The house first went to my uncle Thomas C. Frank, who did much of the restoration work and adding the front porch. When he passed, it went to my aunt Jean M. Moore and her husband Robin Moore. Robin became very sick in 2020, and soon it became too much for him to make it up and down the stairs. They moved, and left the entire property to my mother. She quickly became overwhelmed and decided to sell.

### **The House**

The house located on the property was built circa 1772 - 1780 by Timothy Scott. The dimensions are roughly 20ft by 30 ft on the outside. (see appendix D) On the top of page 30 in *Old Stonework in Bucks County* is a close match to the type of stonework used in the walls of the original portion. The foundation and walls are local fieldstone, with a lime and sand mortar, mixed with horsehair. The outside of the house was also covered in this same mixture, but many portions have since worn away. Around 2010, the current stucco was added. The house originally faced north, but at an undetermined point in time the old front door was boarded up, so that it now faces south. This probably occurred in the 1940s, when Aquetong Road was paved, and a deep ditch created on the inside of the S-curve. The original porch on the south side was built then, but was replaced around 2005 with the current one, along with a wheelchair ramp. Around 2010, the original front door was un-boarded, and the current back porch added. It was also around this time that the sand mound behind the house was added.

Originally 3 bays wide, an addition from circa the 1960s now brings that number to 4. It remains a single pyle deep. The dirt floor basement was added around the 1950s, and a garage was built on the west side of the house. The single story addition has the same type of foundation as the main house, though with more modern concrete mortar. The walls are wooden with wood siding, and it has a small attic area above.

The 20 ft by 14 ft garage, on the other hand, had no foundation, and only a dirt floor. A small attic area above the main part was used for storing various tools. Next to the garage were two 8 ft sq metal sheds from the 1960s. The brown one next to the garage faced south, has a plywood floor, and metal doors. The white shed behind it was similar, though it faced west and had wooden doors. All of these were removed in the 2010s after Jean

Moore, this writer's aunt, had them torn down. A concrete pad was poured in the area of the garage, but the county refused to allow a new structure to be built there. Instead, a pole barn style, 3 car garage was added across the circular driveway from the main house.

A small, square, wooden gazebo was added circa 1998. It is made of treated and sealed red cedar, with latticework wood sides and a double bench swing. It is located about 50 ft from the main house on the southeast side, and measures about 6 ft sq. Finally, circa 2000, a large back porch was added, measuring 20ft by 8ft and made of treated wood. At the same time, the board covering the original front door (now the back) was removed to allow access to the porch. See Figure 4 for dimensions and floorplans.

The first floor of the main house has two rooms. The kitchen is narrow, with barely enough room for two people to work at once. The main room is larger, allowing it to be used as a living room. The fireplaces connected to the two chimneys seen on the exterior are long boarded up, but one was in the southwest corner of the kitchen, and the other was in the eastern wall, which is now shared by the addition. Both could be unboarded and reused, if restored by an expert. All the floors on the ground level were covered in linoleum in the 1950s, which was replaced in the 2010s. The ceiling in the main section, however, still has visible support beams. The door to the stairs is right next to the original front door, and has a closet underneath it. A bathroom was added to the addition in the 2010s.

The stairs themselves are quite narrow, with the bottom of the attic stairs as the ceiling. The original wooden beams are again visible on the second floor, as is the original wood floor. This level was originally only two bedrooms, but around the 1950s, a bathroom was added. Before then, there was only an outhouse on the property. The master bedroom is the one entered first after coming up the stairs. In the western wall are two cabinets for storing items, that used to be warming chambers when the chimney below was in use. A closet fills the space on the southern wall between the bathroom and the guest bedroom. The second bedroom is slightly smaller than the main one. The staircase juts into it. In the 2010s, the closet was expanded, cutting the back bedroom down in size.

Having never been allowed into the attic or basement, there's nothing that can be added about them at this time, except to note that the attic has two shuttered windows, one both the eastern and western sides. In 2023, access to the attic was finally granted. The attic has wooden floors, and while not subdivided, could easily be insulated and used as a third story room. The door from below was enlarged by the author's father and uncle in the early 2000s, but is still easily lifted. The dirt floor basement still has the two original 300 year old support beams, made from whole tree trunks with

the bark removed. The original foundation timbers can also be seen, half tree trunks with the bark still on. All of these beams are easily 2 feet across.

### **Soil Type and the Land Today**

The soil on the property is of the Doylestown silt loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes (DoB). According to the Soil Survey of Bucks and Philadelphia Counties Pennsylvania:

This soil is on middle and lower portions on slopes. Areas generally are elongated or irregular in shape and 3 to 150 acres or more in size. The profile of this soil is similar to the one described as representative of the Doylestown series, except that the solum is slightly thinner.

Included with this soil in mapping are some areas of similar soils that are moderately deep and some that contain more than 10 percent coarse fragments in the surface and subsoil. Also included are small areas of Reavillie and Abbottstown soils.

Most of this soil is used for hay and pasture. Some large areas are used for corn and soybeans. This soil is generally wet and poorly suited to crops. It is suited for water-tolerant pasture grasses and trees.

The high water table and slow permeability limit most nonfarm uses of the soil. Capability unit IVw-2. (85)

Most of the land is currently woodlands and relatively small clearings which are no bigger than an acre or three. The soil, as stated above, is wet, and since the building of a second house downhill on the property, often approaches swampland after rain and while snow is melting. Trees on the property consist mainly of poplar, dogwood, red cedar, beech, and oak. A sour cherry tree stood next to the road on the western edge. This was removed in the early 2000s. A huge pine tree and an equally ancient oak tree stood at opposite ends of the inside circle of the driveway, but were cut down in the early 2000s. The oak proved to be 250+ years old, according to the rings on the stump. Raspberry and blackberry bushes are also common, as well as wild grapevines, poison ivy, jack in the pulpit, skunk cabbage, snake lily, bluebells, and honeysuckle. Scattered throughout this woodland are boulders of varying sizes, which are diabase outcrops from the underlying dykes. The largest, near Dark Hollow Run, is just over 6 feet (1.83 meters) in length.

Four creeks wind their way through the woods, running parallel to the western property line, which is the fourth creek. This creek is the upper portion of Dark Hollow Run, a locally known stream that appears on several

old maps from the 18th and 19th centuries. A few ghost stories are associated with the lower portion of Dark Hollow, but not the portion located on the property.

The underlying geology is that of the Newark Basin, specifically the Brunswick formation's red shale, intercut with a huge diabase dike. Boulders from this dike can be found throughout the wooded portion of the property. Some reach a length of 6 feet. The creeks mentioned above have actually formed where the dike has cracked, and the red shale exposed. The property has never been formally geologically surveyed, and so the diabase outcrops do not appear on official geologic maps.

### **Questions Left Unanswered**

When and how did the property become Thomas Ross's? Was the apparent theft of land intentional?

What happened to the fishery? Do the remains still exist, and where was it?

How old are the woods on the property? Timothy Scott's estate records show that he had livestock and farmland, and there appear to be no trees even approaching 150 years old, other than those formerly near the house.

If the barn Scott would have needed was on the property, where was it?

Why do older maps show Dark Hollow Run as being so far away?

Where does Adams come in? For that matter, what about Canby?

Where was the schoolhouse mentioned in local legend? No schoolhouses are recorded anywhere along Dark Hollow Run.

Note: If the maps are not actually included, I apologize. I was unable to get them from my family in time. The only original printed copy of this report had xeroxed maps, and I was only able to recover the digital one from a very old and damaged floppy. The maps can be found at the Doylestown and New Hope Historical Societies, as referenced in the Works Cited Below.



### **Works Cited**

Bucks County Deed Records. Recorder's Office. Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

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## Appendix A:

Plotted boundaries and floorplans

## Appendix B:

### Maps

Appendix C:

Deeds, Estate Record, Land Grant Patent

## Appendix D:

## Miscellaneous